

JUNE-JULY

VOL. I, NO. 2

STORY

The only magazine devoted solely
to
the Short Story

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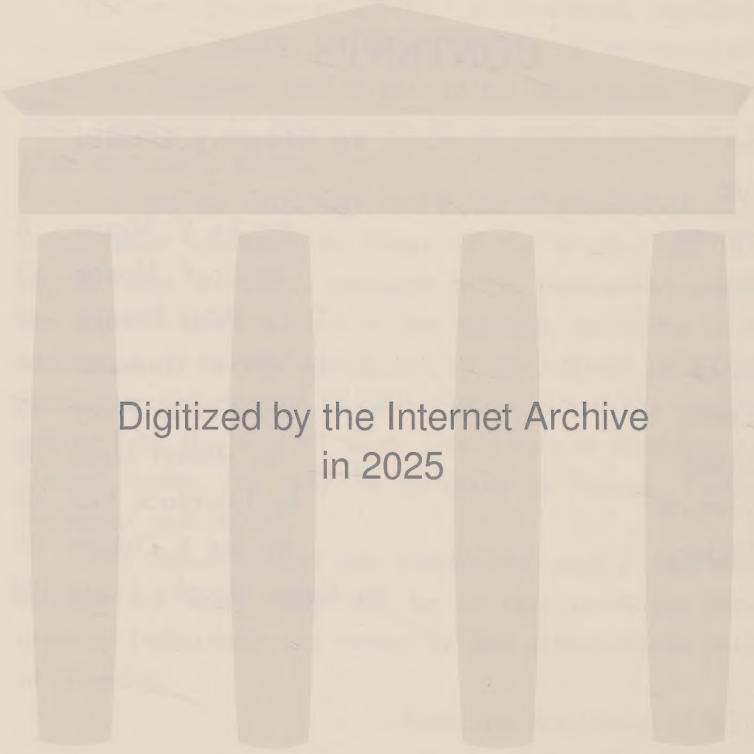
—from the first issue of STORY
(now out of print)

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Story, a bi-monthly
June—July Number
1931

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Poetzleinsdorferstrasse 16



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THE KIMONO

by

Ira V. Morris

The fact is I felt so pleased that Saturday afternoon I almost decided to take a taxi home from the station. It's not exactly an everyday event, is it, to receive a notice to go up to the boss's office, and when you push open the door, fully expecting to be blown up for some bit of inefficiency on your part, have him swing towards you in his swivel chair, smiling from mouth to ear, and exclaim, "Well, Mr. Van Dusen, I have some good news for you. We've decided to switch Mr. Sands to another department. Do you think you could step into his shoes? It means a substantial raise in salary, to begin at once."

Well, what could I say? I stammered out something about being honored and trying to do my best, and the boss grinned again and said, "That's all right, Mr. Van Dusen. We've always considered you a dependable sort of fellow." It does you good to hear a thing like that, I can tell you. After having had the old harness on for thirteen years, you feel at last that someone appreciates your work.

As I walked down Main Street and up Union Avenue it seemed to me that almost everyone must realize something big had happened. Even the dogs seemed to bark in a new way that afternoon and the clang of the street cars had a kind of

joyful note. When I got a hundred yards from the house I couldn't wait any longer, and broke into a run which I accelerated till I was fairly leaping along by the time I reached the front gate. I kicked it open, tore down the garden path and then up the front steps three at a time; I hadn't acted so crazy since I was a boy at school. The door was open, but I think I would have jumped right through if it hadn't been.

My wife was drying the baby after his evening bath when I crashed into the room, and she was so surprised she almost dropped him on the floor; but when she gave a look at my face she also for some reason or other began to laugh with pleasure, (how young and pretty she looks when she laughs), and put the baby back in its crib. In two words I told her what had happened—then, taking hold of her by the waist, whirled her about the room till we were both of us completely out of breath, while little Peter lay watching with his tiny face wrinkled into laughter and his red legs kicking in the air. Suddenly my wife stopped in the middle of a turn, and still laughing and trying to control her laughter said, "Oh Van, I'd almost forgotten. There's a telegram for you in the living room. It was addressed to you, so I didn't open it."

For a minute a funny feeling of fear, or rather annoyance shot right through me. Could any bad news come at such a moment? But going downstairs to get the wire my confidence came back. I felt a strength inside me I had never known before. I even felt that I could twist the wording of that telegram!

I tore open the yellow slip and read.

"Dear Harry welcome home your long lost brother who is going to pay you back those five hundred simoleons he owes you am motoring out in my car to spend the night with you Bill."

Well, it never rains but it pours. Back up the stairs I flew, almost turning my ankle on the landing, and scared Peggy half to death this time when I burst on her in the bedroom.

"Darling—Bill's back home! He's driving out tonight."

"No, honest? You're not joking?"

My wife jumped up and grabbed the wire from my hand.

"What a telegram!" Her face was wreathed in smiles. "Just typical of Bill, isn't it?"

"He doesn't spare the pennies, does he?"

"He certainly doesn't. 'Motoring out in my car,' he says. Can you imagine Bill owning a car?"

"Well, I can't imagine him owning anything, though I certainly can imagine him borrowing someone else's," I replied.

"Now what do you mean by that remark?"

Peggy always did have a habit of defending my brother, even when he was obviously in the wrong, as he usually was.

"Oh, nothing at all," I calmed her down. "I was only going to say that if I do get back those five hundred smacks I lent him, then I suppose miracles are possible after all."

"I always told you you'd get them back."

"Well, I'll believe it when they clink in my pocket."

Still, I'll admit that I felt pretty good when, leaving Peggy to put the kid to bed, I went to make up the living room sofa for Bill to sleep on and telephoned the butcher to send around a couple of extra chops for supper. I really had about said good-bye to those five hundred dollars, as well as to any prospects of ever getting a raise at the office, and now it all seemed to be coming out right at the same time, and without any effort on my part either. I never would have dared to ask again for that raise, just as I long ago gave up writing Bill about the money, and here were things falling my way in the end simply from sitting pretty and saying nothing. Funny

life it was, wasn't it? But not a bad one—oh not by any means! And in my delight I shouted to my neighbor, who was watering his garden with a broken hose patched up with court-plaster and sealing wax, "Say, Mr. Harrison, would you like to borrow my new hose?" and immediately regretted my generosity.

Bill drove up in time for dinner in a swell little blue runabout, and I went to meet him at the front gate.

"Where's Peggy?" was the first question he asked, and when he caught sight of her in the entrance he ran up to kiss her, though he'd only shaken me by the hand. He was the same Bill as ever, spontaneous and careless and somehow a likeable cuss—goodlooking with that slick, black hair of his which he brushed back from the forehead.

What had he been doing, we of course wanted to know, and tickled to death as usual when he could talk about himself, he sat down on the verandah swing without even taking off his hat and coat and was soon in the midst of the woolliest tale of luck and adventure I've ever heard. He had been twice around the world since he saw us last, shipped as able-bodied seaman aboard a tramp and spent six months in the Orient representing some oil firm or other, though God only knows what Bill had to do with oil. Still, it seemed to have been profitable, and the proof was when he pulled out a big wad of notes from his wallet and skimming off the six top ones, handed me so many hundred dollar bills, as he casually announced,

"The extra hundred is meant for interest."

What a chap Bill was anyway! He had the grand manner all right, I'll say that for him.

It wasn't till we had actually sat down to supper that I had a chance to break the big news about my raise in salary, for every time I tried to bring the conversation around Bill

launched off on some new spell-binding yarn and Peggy would make signs to me not to interrupt. Finally, however, I managed to keep his attention long enough to blurt it out, and my brother did his best to look interested, (I guess it was hard work for an egotist like Bill), and he murmured, "That's fine, old man. Congratulations."

And now this happening, which half an hour before had seemed so important that I almost took a cab back from the station, appeared insignificant to such a degree that it was almost impudent to mention it. That's the way Bill always made you feel—as if you hardly counted at all, might just as well tie a rock around your neck and jump into the lake.

When we got through supper we all sat down in the living room, (Peggy said she'd wash the dishes in the morning), and Bill took out a lot of photographs of his travels and showed them to us. Here he was in a pullover sweater and trousers that were too long for him standing arm-in-arm with two tough-looking guys before some sort of cafe; you could see the tables on the sidewalk. Bill said this was Buenos Aires. Then there was another showing him in a gorgeous green kimono standing beside a Japanese temple; he told us that they wore kimonos over there in broad daylight, like regular street garments, and that he had brought this one back with him and used it as a dressing gown. In fact there were pictures from all over the world, and in each of them, of course, Bill figured as the central personage; Bill sitting on a camel in front of the sphinx, Bill and a girl in front of Notre Dame in Paris, France, Bill and two other Janes somewhere in Italy. I got fairly fed up hearing his voice going on and on—this is me somewhere or other, this is me and some pal somewhere else, here's me and a girl friend in still another place. There was no mistaking him, even without his keeping on advertising his presence.

"You seem to be attracted to the skirts, Bill," I kidded him along, kind of out of spite, but he didn't seem to mind, felt rather complimented even.

"Sure—you've got to find something to do on a long evening, don't you? We haven't all got pretty wives sitting at home waiting for us like you married men."

When we got through the whole bunch and had had everything explained to us, I thought I'd get out our album and show him what we'd been doing in the meanwhile, but Peggy, who usually took such a pride in our pictures, said,

"Why do you want to bother Bill with those?"

"Sure, Peggy," said Bill. "I'd love to see them—honest."

"They're mostly of the kid, you know," I explained apologetically. "But perhaps you'll be interested in some of the snaps we took at Norwood, Mass. last summer. We visited Peggy's aunt during the summer holidays."

"Sure, I'd love to see them."

But we had not gotten half way through when Bill interrupted,

"Say—what do you folks say to stepping out a bit? There's the car, brimful of gas and just panting to be off. How about joggling into town and stepping out for some celebrations? Prodigal's return, you know, and all that stuff."

I might have guessed that Bill would suggest something of the kind! He never could stay at home one night and be quiet. And now that the suggestion was made I knew at once from the pleased look on Peggy's face that we were in for it. I suppose I could hardly blame her, seeing that we hadn't spent an evening in town for at least two months and that we certainly did have something to celebrate to-night, other than the prodigal's return, I mean. Only I thought that someone might have mentioned this last argument.

It was a cold hour's drive into town, leastwise for me sitting alone in the dicky seat and when we finally arrived, I gladly chimed in with Bill's suggestion to get a bottle of something or other before going on to a place to dance. We waited for him a few minutes in the car, which he had stopped before an innocent-looking Italian restaurant, till he reappeared with something sticking out of his overcoat pocket and a successful look in his eyes.

"Well, that's O. K." he said. "Now where do we go from here?"

"You're the judge," I told him. "Peggy and I aren't much up on the night game, you know."

"How about the Black and White then? There's a good Negro show there at midnight."

"Sounds all right to me," said I.

Well, it might have sounded all right but it certainly didn't look it. It was a dark cellar of a place, you had to stagger down half a flight to get into it, and it was filled to overflowing with Negroes with diamond stick pins, half-naked chorus girls, and a smattering of other black and white riff-raff in various stages of intoxication. I thought we had come to the wrong place but Bill assured us it was quite all right. As a matter of fact he seemed to be known here, for the waiter called him by his name and showed us to what he said was a good table near the orchestra, though why it was better than any of the others I failed to see.

"Now how about a little drink," suggested Bill, and he poured our three glasses half full of whiskey and sprinkled a little ginger ale on top. It tasted like vitriol but Bill swallowed his in three gulps and Peggy winced but managed to get away with a couple of swallows. The saxophone suddenly whined in my ear and the Negro orchestra burst into commotion.

"That's a good girl," said Bill with a laugh. "Now come and have a dance with your brother-in-law."

I watched them sidle through the raft of tables which separated us from the cleared space, and then she put her arm on Bill's shoulder and they were swallowed up in all the other couples dancing or pushing each other across the floor. They made a handsome pair, I thought, as I caught sight of them again at the other end of the room: they were dancing close together, as was everyone else, and she was looking up into his face and laughing.

And for no reason in particular I suddenly remembered something that my mother had said years before when I told her that I intended marrying Peggy and she was trying to talk me out of it: that she would make a better wife for a wild, erratic sort of fellow like Bill than for a good, steady man who wanted to get on in the world. Well, that had all proved nonsense, I reflected. Here we had been married five years, going on six, and despite our occasional quarrels we certainly got on far better than most married people, while any tendencies to flightiness that Peggy might have had seemed to have disappeared when little Peter came. What if she still did like a good time now and then? Surely no one could see any harm in that.

I sat sipping my whiskey and thinking in a pleased sort of way about the last few years and things in general. The stuff did not taste so bad after the first swallows and when I had poured myself a second glass and finished it I felt just about all right. Everything seemed to me to be pretty well planned and agreeable, more agreeable than I had ever known it before, or rather I felt that it had always been like this, but that I had never appreciated it till now. If one only worked hard and had confidence in oneself it seemed one got what

one deserved in the end, even though things did look pretty hopeless more than half the time; it was all a sort of give and take, but when one finally got there it was worth the struggle. I was pleased with the present and with the past, while it seemed to me that the future was rosier still, that I would be given an even better position at the ofice and then I could save some money and buy some stock. Tapping on the table with my knife in time to the melody that filled the air, lulled by the dim lights and the whiskey and the swaying figures, I certainly felt on the crest of the wave — —

"I'll say we had a wonderful dance," Bill's voice broke in on my reverie.

Peggy and he had wound their way back through all the tables and were sitting down before I was even aware that the tune had ended. I jumped up and helped her into her chair.

"I was thinking that you two made a fine couple together," I said. "You seem to be just cut out for one another."

"Really?" said Peggy giving a poke at her hair as she smiled up at Bill.

"Oh, yes. Aren't you glad that you've got such a nice sister-in-law, Bill?"

"Of course," said Bill. "Don't you know that's why I came back from the Orient?"

We all laughed. Bill poured us out another round of drinks as the orchestra crashed into tune and I looked at Peggy, and nodded meaningly towards the floor. It was my first attempt at dancing in about three years, and considering the amount of whiskey I had gotten away with, I do not think it went so badly at all, even if we did almost fall down once and had to grab on to a table for support. I insisted that someone had tried to trip us up, adding wittily that perhaps it was because

husbands and wives weren't allowed to dance together in a place like this.

"You're drunk, Van," said Peggy and she laughed. Pretty, she looked tonight with her big black eyes all shiny and bright, I guessed that was the liquor, and the lines of her slim youthful figure showing beneath that blue silk dress, my favourite dress ever since we bought it together four years ago. She seemed in her element somehow in a place like this, though I guess she'd only been to such joints a few times in her life.

At three o'clock the Black and White closed. We were all of us pretty tight by then but Bill said it was too early to go home and of course I agreed with him. After all, wasn't tomorrow Sunday and wasn't this party supposed to be a celebration—though what we were celebrating seemed a little mixed in my mind.

When I got up from the table my head reeled, so that I seemed to be walking on the ceiling, and the tables swam around and banged into each other and then into me, and all at once we were on the street, where a cold wind was slapping me in the face. I remember my hat flying off and rolling down the sidewalk and my chasing after it till I was almost run over by a taxicab, probably would have been if Bill hadn't yanked me aside.

Then I was back in the dicky seat, and we were tearing through the streets again while I held my hat with both my hands to prevent a repetition of its flight; we pulled up with a jolt and a crunching of brakes at the Italian restaurant where we had bought the whiskey.

"Get out," said Bill. "We're there."

I was sitting at a table opposite my brother and two brown glasses were in front of us again. My brain was muddled and I felt extremely drunk, yet in the back of my mind I knew

that there was something very important that I had to say—I had been wanting to say it all evening—but now I could not quite remember what it was. Perhaps if I had another drink I would remember. I drank the whiskey, and my brain was suddenly quite clear and I remembered.

"Bill," I said, leaning across the table. "There's something I want to tell you. Get married. Quit bumming around like you've been doing and try to settle down. It's the only way to be happy. Find yourself some nice girl—like Peggy here—someone you can love. Get a job. I tell you you've never known what happiness is—"

My head fell forward on the table. I could not finish the sentence, for my brain had begun to go around the room in enormous circles, round and round and round. From very far away I heard a voice—was it Bill's?—and then another gruff voice with an Italian accent. I remember noting the foreign accent and wondering who the man could be. Someone was taking me under the arms, trying to raise me up. I mumbled a few words and attempted to break away from him but only succeeded in falling back on the chair—or was it the floor? My feet would not do what I wanted. Then I was walking again or someone was pushing or carrying me; up something I stumbled, higher and higher up, and suddenly I was confronted with a door and then a bed. I fell down on it and closed my eyes—and my brain kept going round and round and round—.

When I woke up in the room above the Italian restaurant it was broad daylight. I was lying on a bed with all my clothes on, and my head ached, and there was a bad taste in my mouth. Slowly the previous evening came back to me, and I remembered that I had been drunk for the first time in my life.

"Well, that *was* a celebration," I thought.

I tried to get up, but my head swam so that I was forced to lie down on the bed again; but in a few moments my head was clearer and I managed to stand up, and presently even staggered down the stairs.

A man in shirtsleeves with a mop was cleaning out the room where we had sat the night before. At my entrance he looked up and grinned in a friendly, understanding sort of way.

"Your head ache, what?"

I nodded to him.

"Want some water?"

He went to the tap and filled a pitcher which he handed to me, together with a note from Bill saying that he had put me to bed, as this seemed the only thing to do, and was going to take Peggy back home in the car. I drank two glasses of water, gave the man a tip and left the restaurant.

I will never forget the train ride home that Sunday morning, with my head almost splitting open at every bump and feeling that I was going to be sick at any moment, yet not being able to when I tried. To make matters worse, the carriage was unheated, leastwise felt as if it were, and my teeth kept chattering in my head from the cold. It was a terrible trip. How I cursed Bill then for ever luring me on that crazy party!

Peggy was tidying up the living room when I came in, and little Peter who'd been left in charge of our neighbors, the Harrisons over night, lay in his carriage ready to be wheeled out for his morning walk. He smiled, raising his stubby arms towards me, as he saw me in the door; I'll swear the little beggar had already begun to recognize me. It certainly did seem good to be back home again after such a night; it made one realize how lucky one was to have a warm home and a wife and kid to come back to. The headache and the unpleasant train ride were at once forgotten, and I felt again

a tingling of pleasure at the thought of my secure, well-ordered life, so seldom interrupted by violent adventures like last night's.

Bill had already left, my wife informed me. He was catching a train for the West Coast the same day, as he had told us, and he did not have the time to await my return.

"Poor fellow!" I exclaimed sympathetically. "He'd be much happier with a home and family! What a life to keep dashing from one place to another without even time to rest for a few days in between. I'd go crazy in about a month."

"Yes, Van," said Peggy. "I guess you would."

I laughed and kissed Peggy on the cheek. Then I went upstairs to undress, for having slept in my clothes I felt sticky all over and thought it would be pretty nice to step into a good hot bath and soak out a little of that whiskey. I was still cold too and my fingers were so stiff that I could hardly undo the buttons. Pulling at my collar, my stud fell out on the floor and rolled under one of the twin beds; I made a futile stab for it before it disappeared. But I wasn't going to let that get away so easily! No indeed—bitter experience having long since taught me the inconveniences of missing collar buttons.

Falling down on my knees, I began carefully rummaging around on the floor, and presently my hand touched, not the collar button, but something soft which I thought must be a sheet or pillow slip fallen through the crack between the beds. When I pulled it out, however, I discovered to my surprise that it was a sort of coat or jacket made of green cloth with yellow figures embroidered in the material. For some time I stood staring at it without realizing what it was; I seemed to have seen it before, and fairly recently, yet I could not quite succeed in placing it.

Then all at once it came to me: it was the kimono Bill was wearing in that picture where he stood beside the Japanese

temple; the kimono which he used as a dressing gown. In a flash I realized what the thing was and what it meant lying under Peggy's bed and everything that must have happened in the room that night. And still staring at that bit of cloth with its beautiful design of interweaving dragons, the thought struck me that I had been absurdly happy the day before.

It seems that a guy just shouldn't be too happy in this world.

G. F. Noxon

Marcel walked, walked down the boulevard with his hair cut crisply in black waves which fell hesitant about his small rapidly moving feet. It was so inevitably the end of the day and so definitely not night, not the corners of the day but the clean painted piece of floor below the window, a pale light without lamps and articulate. It spoke to him of that day at Chantilly when, he, abandoned of the womenfolk, had kept the night that was moonless in picking his way through the woods that fringed the railway station, fighting his way through the hostile woods that fringe the railway and divide the railway station from the race track. So had he kept the last of the day, abandoned in the fringe of woods beside the railway station at Chantilly on a race day at Chantilly abandoned of the womenfolk beside the railway station in the hostile woods with Marcel's crisp black hair falling crystallate into the innumerable difficulty causing puddles which prevented him from breaking manfully through on to the platform where now overnight the black and khaki carriages, old ones for use on race days, were lined up for use on the next race day to take the people from the races which were to be held a fortnight hence at Chantilly. This was indescribable this fight through the trees, this was felt, these trees were felt, bending down their peach-like branches, soft and sour, to prevent Marcel, the abandoned from eventually and manfully breaking through unto the railway track, to eventually and with manful

weariness throw his tired self unto the length of khaki seat which was fixed on to the wall of the carriage which would take him to Paris. The seats were made skilfully with curves to force the yielding sleeping figure to lie comfortably in safety asleep all the way to Paris in the evening. But, there were all these trees and beech woods up against him, fastened up against him, corsets to his desire, full of tempered steel hooks, blue from the fire, to fasten and bind him in them through his toes to the earth stationary. His immobility had fixed the sun in evening, had influenced the stars to station and had brought about this long twilight, he was tempting the dark to come and wash him helplessly back through the woods to the deserted race course where to wander nightly to the day: he would wander. Oh had ever desire seemed so more powerfully helpless in those woods, that fringe of woods where he had kept the night with puddles at Chantilly on the racecourse at Chantilly on a race day at Chantilly. It was so articulate, the twilight, so full of odour, so comprehensible, so sudden, so lasting, so valuable, so like Grecian-God-tales so eternal that, he, Marcel, was forced to take a passing woman in his arms to make her see the twilight, to take her fine hair about his eyes to daze himself, to break the papal prelate hairs, to tear up their purple orders to the brain, to refute their express orders that she might see and feel the twilight, so like Grecian-God-tales. Until the darkness when he once again would skilfully regain the country of the world community and the darkness would carry him along safely and sensibly in black and khaki carriages to Paris, to the boulevards of Paris.

BORDEAUX

We got in at Marseilles. The train was crowded but there were seats if you could make people take their bundles off them. "Seats for everyone," said the *controleur*, "seats for everyone, for all the world there are seats." We found two seats

and in the same compartment. We thought we were lucky and not without reason.

"Art," said Hermione, when we were seated, "is very mysterious."

"Quand je faisais mon droit à Montpellier, j'allais souvent là-bas. Elle était déjà vieille mais charmante."

"Yes," I replied, "art is indeed very mysterious."

"When one considers," continued Hermione, "that a Gothic cathedral such as Coutances, Vivaldi's *Concerto Grosso* and the last few hundred feet of Pudovkin's *Storm over Asia*, all produce a similar reaction in the sensitive mind, one is overcome and confused by the complexity of art's forms and the multiplicity of its manifestations."

"Exactly," I replied.

In the far corner of the compartment sat two Africans dressed in the uniform of the French Colonial Army. They were both either asleep or dosing for their heads were thrown back revealing the mysterious dark passages that were their nostrils and their lips were drawn revealing their brilliant unbrushed white teeth. One held a tin kettle loosely in his drooping hand.

"Oui, je la voyais assez souvent. Elle marchait lentement et silencieusement le long de la rivière. Ses yeux ne semblaient pas me voir quand je passais quiqu'ils me regardaient toujours fixement," continued the lawyer from Montpellier.

"And again," said Hermione, "the artist presents quite as many and as difficult problems as his art. His mind in the service of his art is capable of isolation from the irrelevant and hindering and of original development under the influence of his historic consciousness. He may thus consciously lead his art or allow himself to be led along certain predefined paths and idealized or again he may, like Vlaminck, follow the

dictates of an instinctive art leaving to the critics the creation of ideals and the definition of excellence."

"Yes," I replied, "There are indeed two kinds of artists."

"*L'année dernière nous sommes allés à Argentière passer l'été avec nos amis protestants de Paris. Madame Dupont y était avec son fils Henri, c'est un charmant garçon de dix-sept ans. Tante Angélique avait beaucoup d'affection pour lui,*" said the Lady from Nîmes. "I always wonder," said Hermione, "whether it would not be better for all artists to ignore the philosophical and purely intellectual aspect of their work and develop an absolute attitude from which absolute criteria could be derived. In this way they could conform to the modern tendency of specialization and perhaps achieve a higher degree of efficiency in a particular sphere."

"Like a Ford car, you mean."

"Yes, like a Ford car or a vacuum cleaner."

"*A ce moment là elle devait avoir environ soixante-dix ans mais elle était encore si jeune qu'on aurait dit qu'elle en avait quarante-cinq.*"

"But surely, Hermione, in thus limiting the field of the artist you give bounds to his effect and take away from it the possibility of the infinite, the universal, the sublime. Surely it is not the artist who should adopt an arbitrary solution but he who is incapable of art."

"Always assuming" said Hermione, "that the infinite, the universal and the sublime are desirable in art. There you introduce a whole scale of values and with it an infinite of personal persuasions."

"*Tante Angélique* —

"Oh my God" said Hermione

disait toujours qu'elle aimait beaucoup les offices au temple de l'Etoile parceque le pasteur avait une manière charmante d'ouvrir la bible," continued the lady from Nîmes.

"Well," I said, "I will take back my last remark as it will probably save me trouble in the long run."

"I don't want you to do that exactly but I do think that you should see that such a remark is quite out of place in this particular discussion. We cannot hope to go into the matter at any depth."

"Exactly," I replied.

"Parfaitement, Monsieur, quand je faisais mon droit à Montpellier je le voyais presque tous les jours. Il était très petit, comme un singe, mais il avait de grandes idées." The lawyer from Montpellier had a pleasant penetrating voice. His conversation was an accompaniment in the bass to our melodious argument in the treble.

"I know a young artist," said Hermione, "who has achieved a very considerable degree of technique in oils, who is clearly possessed of a valuable and personal sense of composition and colour values and above all an intense appreciation of objects, whether they be bottles or human beings objectified or cream buns. And with these gifts and accomplishments he is far from being content. On the contrary he feels that there is some vital constituent lacking in his art. One day in the Uffizi we were standing together in front of the birth of Venus. He said to me, 'I might have painted any object or disassociated objects in that picture, I might even have arranged such objects in a pleasing and valuable pattern but I could never have achieved such a picture as a whole because I have no power of mystic conception.'

"I replied that he could hardly expect his conceptions to coincide with those of Botticelli and then he said that I didn't see what he meant at all and I said I did." At this point the train slowed down at a station. It came painfully to a standstill. One of the Africans was jogged out of his doze. His eyes

met mine. "Bordeaux? Bordeaux?" he said. I shook my head. He knew no French. He resumed his sleep and his kettle was miraculously in his hand.

"Oui, il a, Avenue de la Grande Armée, tout près de l'Eglise, un gentil petit appartement dont le salon a une vue sur tout Paris. Marcel y va souvent, le soir, jouer avec la petite Eveline. La soeur est fiancée — non, je ne le connais pas mais je sais que son pere est fort riche. Il habite Lille —

"As I was saying," said Hermione.

"There are several hotels in Carcassonne," I interrupted because I didn't want to hear any more observations on Botticelli, "and what we've got to decide is which we're going to, the cheap one that might be worse or the expensive one that could hardly be better."

"That, I shall leave entirely to you," said Hermione.

The train stopped. I caught the African's eye again. "Bordeaux? Borrrdeaux?" He spoke mutely with his eyes more than his voice. He formed the word severally with his eyes with difficulty, with pain, with hesitation. I shook my head. He knew no French. He resumed backwards into sleep and Hermione began again. She spoke, I am sure, of pictures, peoples, places and, I am sure of cardboard boxes. I woke up on cardboard boxes, cigarette boxes, boxes made by a friend of hers, a Russian, an artist, in Alexandria where they kill the English, cannot help killing the English every now and then, well, this Russian, in the winter he lived in St. Petersburg and in the summer he lived in the Caucasus, he left Russia for Egypt where they were very bitter against the English, it appears they kill the English, so it appears and think of it so much and so much, a mere nothing about whatsoever at all you know, in fact nothing at all.

Here I woke up.

"We are going to the *Hôtel de la Cité*," I said, "yes, certainly, to the *Hôtel de la Cité*."

"Where?" said Hermione.

"In Carcassonne, of course and what was that story about your Russian and that Arab? It sounded a good story."

"You were asleep," said Hermione, "and besides it wasn't an Arab, it was a Greek and you slept right through it."

"*Quand je faisais mon droit à Montpellier.*"

We were all at once in the station at Carcassonne and there was as usual no time at all to get the luggage down and on to the platform, less time than usual because the African held me for two words.

Bordeaux? Bordeaux? mutely for two words insistently. I shook my head. He knew no French. It was twelve hours to Bordeaux.

SHERREL

by

Whit Burnett

I do not know whether I can do this thing or not. Maybe it is just a thought, maybe I just think it is necessary to do it. I mean about the name. I have thought about it a lot though and it keeps urging at me. It is not easy to understand. But I must try to understand and explain it.

You see, I actually did have a brother. People sometimes asked me, Are you the only boy in the family? And I've said, Yes. This wasn't a lie wholly. I was the first born in my family. But there were others, two others. One died in long clothes. We have his picture at home. The other was named Sherrel.

It is easy to remember him. My mother had us photographed together, for instance. And one especial print was transferred onto little smooth discs the size of a saucer. The discs fit into small twisted wire easels and my brother and I used to sit on the easel like that on my mother's bureau in the bedroom.

He was, as I said, younger than I. This is important. The neighbors used to say, It's the difference in their ages. They tried to explain in that way why I was so mean. And you can see the difference clearly enough on the picture discs. We both stood by the photographer's chair, a plush chair. But I

was up to the top of it. My brother's hand rested on the arm. It looks pretty small to me now because I'm twice as old as I was then. We both wore black velvet tam-o'-shanters and dark red velvet coats and pants. My mouth was a little open, too, looking at the photographer. I did not touch my brother. He had one hand, which was very small, on the chair, and the other one had hold of me. His hair was lighter than mine and softer and his eyes wider and bluer. He had a small mouth like a flower and it was smiling. He was a beautiful child. This was the brother I killed.

I am not telling you about a melodrama. I won't be arrested and hanged. I did not kill him yesterday. It was a long time ago, in fact, and I do not remember it all the time, only sometimes when something suggests the way I was then or when someone asks, Have you any other brothers? And I say, No. And here too in this other town at this school except for a girl I know I am quite alone in certain ways and in the winter as now I have seen any number of things to remind me. There is, for example, an epidemic of smallpox here and instead of smooth fast automobile hearses they still have funeral carriages that drag along slowly through the streets. Only once have I ridden in such a carriage. And that was then.

There are some things difficult to remember out of childhood. I do not remember when my brother was born. There was not so much difference then. Only four years before, I had been born. But I remember clearly when I was nine. My brother then was five. And we were two in the family. But I was the first.

Do you know how this is? Nine and five? Well, nine is somebody. Five is still curls. At nine I have seen something of the world. What have you seen at five? Go on, you can't come with us! Go on back to the house! We're going down

to the store. You'll get run over. Go on, you can't play with us. You ain't big enough. Go on, grow up some before you come tagging around after us. Who asked you along? Beat it! I know how that is. I said all that, more brutally even. He didn't say anything. He didn't cry or whine or crab. I probably would have. He stopped following simply, and stood there. And then we ran off. He stood alone. Sometimes I found him other places alone, sitting still in a corner thinking quietly about something. I am always a little puzzled now I am older. I have talked it over with others. He would have been important . . . But at nine one is a weed, growing wild. Five is still in the hothouse.

We lived near the sand hills. It wasn't until several years later that I really got into the hills exploring them with a cousin of my own age. Sherrel never did get there. And there was a great liking in both of us for the hills, his maybe different from mine. I often found him sitting dreaming looking at them. But one day late in the Spring the hills in a way came down to our house. A cloudburst drenched them, rolling down soft sand, cutting great ditches in the road in front of our place. We weren't long in discovering that, I'll tell you. When Sherrel wandered out of the kitchen the ditch was full of us kids. It was a peach of a ditch as high as our head, gnawed with caves and dangers.

I started the discoveries. There's some hole, I yelled. And down I had gone, doing what the others wanted to do, the first to absorb their wishes. Then they followed, yelling too. Sherrel, I suppose, could hear my voice coming up out of the ground. He came over to the ditch and looked down, standing alone above us. Go on back, I shouted, you'll fall in. He moved away. I paid no more attention then to him and the rest of us ran racing, hiding, searching, together in the wash.

And then, separated from the others for a moment or so, I noticed something odd about my hands. Hey, kids, I cried, lookee! Look at my hands! They looked. They stood back in wonderment. They looked at their own hands. No, they couldn't, they said. It was something funny. Look what Martin can do! Lookee, he can peel off his hands! It was true, something had happened to my hands. I took hold and pulled off long shreds of skin. I amazed them all. They stood astounded.

Let me see, said somebody. It was Sherrel.

Say, I yelled, didn't I say not to come down here? You ain't big enough to be in this here ditch? Let me see your hands, he said. The kids were all looking at me. I'll let you see, all right! I said. He stood his ground and didn't go. That makes me mad, I felt. No, I said. I took him by the shoulder and talked straight in his face, hard. How many times do I have to tell you to get out of this ditch! He turned around and walked up the gorge to a shallower spot and climbed slowly out.

A day or so later Sherrel stayed in bed. There's something the matter with him, my mother said. She didn't know what. Then he took a high fever, they said, and was delirious. I thought it was strange about delirious. Sherrel's eyes were shut and he looked as if he was sleeping but he was talking without any sense. We'll have to have a doctor, my mother said. And that afternoon the doctor came to our house, wiping his feet at the door and entering with a serious look. Let's see the other young fellow, he said. Anything wrong with him? He had a little sore throat, my mother said, but he's all right. He looked down my throat. Look at my hands, I said, ain't they funny?

What I thought, he said.

The same afternoon a man from down town came and nailed up a yellow flag. It was a cloth sign saying, black on orange, Scarlet Fever. I couldn't go out of the yard. That's sure tough, the kids said, peering through the pickets. I even had to keep back from the fence, too. It was catching.

I sat on the steps fronting north from our bare two room brick house and looked at the hills. I had had the Scarlet Fever and hadn't even known it. Why, my mother said, he was playing around all the time. Why, he was out there playing in the ditch with all those children. That's bad, said the doctor. But my brother was worse. He had it good.

I remember the windows in the front room were darkened and my mother never went to bed. She never took her clothes off. And my father didn't go to work. My aunt came to the fence with a bag of oranges and bananas. How is he? she asked. If he isn't any better Dr. Anderson says he'd better have a consultation, said my mother. How is Dr. Anderson? asked my aunt. He is the best doctor in town, my mother said.

I sat in the sun all tired now and weak. But I wasn't sick. I was big and nine.

I remember the consultation. There were four doctors in the kitchen standing around and talking low and sitting down and getting up. I could see in from outside. My mother was nervous and walking around and my father, who was a big heavy man, stood around too and sat down and then got up. They were waiting for something definite they spoke of that I could not understand. It was the Crisis. I asked what it was, and my mother had said, Sherrel will get better then. I didn't know what a Crisis would be like and I opened the door slowly and got into the house quietly, past the doctors.

My father and mother were in the front room by the bed where Sherrel lay. He was still and wasn't talking deliriously.

And then my mother, who was standing by him with my father waiting, suddenly cried terribly for a minute or so, and then she took hold of my father and pulled him down by the bed to the floor. I didn't know what was happening. I was frightened, too. Pray, she sobbed. Pray, if you never prayed before. Oh, God, she began... and she was crying more and more. My father was kneeling heavily and strangely in a big dark bulk. He put his arm around my mother. There, there, he said. I never saw them like that before. My father is English, my mother is German. I did not think about that though then. I thought, I am scared; this is all different, and dark. I stood in the doorway, too frightened to move.

Come in, Martin, my mother suddenly cried out to me. Come in to your brother. Come here with us. I came over, and there we were all kneeling down together.

Do you want your brother to die? she asked. No, I said. I was frightened at her, at the strange heavy silence on my father, at my brother even. Go and look at him, she told me.

I got up and looked at my brother's white face. It was like a face of ivory with pale lips. I looked hard. He was different too. What do I do? I thought. I am rough, not like that. My mother is looking at me terribly. Kiss him. I bent over and touched his face. His lips opened with a quiet breath, like a little flower bursting on my cheek.

The crisis came and passed. It came while we were in the room there. My mother could not wait. She went to the bed, trying to wake up my brother. Look, Sherrel, she whispered, we are going to get you the nice pearl-handled pocketknife tomorrow. You won't have to wait till Christmas. Tomorrow. You just get well, now. Sherrel! Do you hear me, Sherrel?

Or, he can have mine, I thought.

But he didn't hear us. He didn't hear anybody. Then my mother went to sleep suddenly, it seemed, and drooped down by the bed and they put her in the other room on a couch.

I stood in the dark by a curtain when the doctors came in. Too bad, said Dr. Anderson. He leaned over my brother. Remarkable head, said one of the others. Isn't it! spoke up another one. Artist's head, said the one with the beard. Yes . . . Then the doctors walked out together into the room where my mother was and in a little while they all left the house.

A few days later there were the strange preparations for the funeral. I don't want to dwell on the funeral. That is not the point. But we rode in a carriage shut in by ourselves, still quarantined, the others following slowly behind us. I remember we passed the Watson's place. They were standing at the gate, the family, staring stupidly at the procession as the horse carriages jogged down the hilly street rolling off to the cemetery.

This is all strange, I thought, riding along past the Watson's house in a carriage like this. My mother and my father and myself. I was taken up with the thought and looked back out of the carriage window now and then at the carriages behind me. My mother pulled me back to sit up straight. My mother's face was drawn and tired and she was crying. My father's eyes had tears in them too. I could not cry. I thought, I ought to cry. How can I cry? I am not hurt any place where I can feel. I squeezed into the corner of the carriage opposite them, pressing up against one hand hard to make it hurt. It turned numb and pained but not in a crying way. You cry easy differently, I thought. Onions, for instance, make you cry. Would it have been a trick, I thought, or right and honest if I had put an onion in my handkerchief, no one seeing me, and then smelt it now and then in the curtained shadows of the carriage. I would have cried then. I wanted to

cry. But all I could think was, Sherrel was a queer kid. Were we brothers sure enough? Am I anybody's brother? Why don't I cry? . . .

You see, he would sit in a corner quiet and frailly beautiful. I was nine and active. It's the difference in their ages. Maybe so. There were the Elwell brothers, now. They were twins. They had a carpenter's shop. It was a peach of a shop, down in a cellar, and they worked together great, making book-ends and rabbit hutches and things like that.

I gave him that sickness. I knew that. That killed him. That is why my brother is dead. But I am trying to remember, to clear things up. I am trying to remember if I thought that then. I remember I thought, It's funny just he got it. Why not Leona Eads, Ed or Billy Simons? They touched my hands. I wondered if I hadn't forced my sickness on my brother out of hatred for him, out of my own peculiar olderbrother hatred. Did I slap him, maybe strike him in the face with my peeling hand? Perhaps I did. I wondered over this for many weeks now and then.

I'm not even sure now. I might have. It's funny how mean, you see, a person can be. I've thought of that. I've got a girl. I've talked things over with her, not everything, but generally you know. She doesn't like meanness either. I remember when I was about twelve, my sister was just coming along then. She was about two and I had to tend her occasionally. I didn't like it. Once my mother said to me, Do you want your little sister to die too? Well, no, I said. She might even have said, Do you want to kill your little sister too? Maybe this was it, because I asked myself that a lot later, trying to be better. I said, Do you want to kill your sister too? No, I said.

I didn't, either. But I remembered what I'd said when she was born. I said, There's enough in this family already. But I

didn't want to kill her. Still I had killed my brother. I had killed Sherrel. Not only by giving him sickness. But by meanness.

This is how I figure it now. I killed my brother by meanness. And it is too bad. I wouldn't do it now. I am not that way. I could have got him a job here in this other town where I am now after he got out of school. I'll be out of school here pretty soon. I'm eighteen next week. Then I'll go on a paper where I've got a stand-in. I'd have said, Now you keep on at school and read a lot of good things, good books you know, poetry and good things and learn how to write. You've got good stuff in you, I can tell. You're going to be an artist. So am I. We'll be two artists, brothers, maybe different, but we can help each other. You've got a poetic style, and I've got a stronger style. I see things more as they are. I'm a little tougher. I can digest more. But that's all right. When I get going, I'll help you. You've got fine things in you. I'll help you bring them out.

That's the kind of a person he would have been. He would have been an artist. There's nothing any bigger than that. Nothing finer. It's the best, in a holy way. It has to be in you first. It hides sometimes and doesn't get a chance to come out where people are.

I've talked that over with people, with that girl I spoke of. I want to be an artist. A writer. I can see back from where I am, though. I've been pretty mean, pretty contemptible. It's funny to look back like that and see yourself in old pictures and things. It's hard to think you had the same name, even.

And that's what I'm puzzling over now. There's nothing wrong with my name, actually. Mark. Mark Stowe. It was first Martin. It was even Martin Tilton Stowe. I didn't like it. All

that, I mean. I cut it down to Mark Stowe. It made me feel surer, quicker, stronger.

But even that doesn't quite go. It doesn't all fit. I'm not all blunt, like that. Mark. Mark Stowe. I've got other things. I've written poems, even, and I wouldn't kiss a girl hard. I know how my brother was. He would have been like that too, only a lot more.

And, you know, about the name . . . My folks are getting along now. Sisters don't count, the way I mean that is. I'm the only boy in the family. And I've been thinking, what if I should write a poem, a long, good one—here I am, alive and everything—and sign it not Mark Stowe but, well, Sherrel Stowe? Do you see what I mean? And then by and by there would be another poem, and after a while I would just go ahead and use it right along. Can you understand that? How I would be more him too, then—Sherrel?

NEIGHBOURS

by

Oliver Gossman

When they went over the stile and across the field to the copse where they cut their faggots, the man had a short rope round his middle and wore an axe in it like a weapon. As they came out again he held the axe by the neck in his left hand and the rope was round a large bundle of light timber which his wife carried. In the shoes she wore her feet appeared large and flat, and the saddle of her rounded shoulders seemed specially formed for burdens.

At the stile, where his wife rested her load on the top spar, he looked to right and left, then whistled sharply to his dog, which was nosing about a burrow in the old warren on the edge of the wood. He waited for the beast to come up, kicked it playfully, said sternly "Keep to heel!" and in much the same tone observed: "We'd best lash the sticks securely."

They were still busy about this operation when the saddler and his wife, who had lately come to be their neighbours, appeared round the bend of the hedge and stopped in the roadway upon seeing them.

"Good-evening, neighbour," said the saddler, whose wife took breath and remained silent.

The saddler was a small, elderly man, rotund as became his prosperity and of ruddy complexion, with such an air of being astute as to make him a little ridiculous. His young wife was taller, was dressed in black, was very grave in demeanour, yet indicated obscurely that underneath an almost statuesque exterior she concealed a good deal of the hussy. Neither paid any attention to the woman on the ground before the faggots: for the moment their eyes were on her husband, who stood erect and stretched himself. He was a handsome fellow, ascetic and morose in look, and the general insolence of his bearing put the saddler quite out of countenance but gratified, it was evident, some secret standard affected by his good lady.

The greeting was not accepted, the man simply yawned. His wife, with a very distressed air and availing herself, as if in desperation, of the saddler's obvious goodwill, made haste to respond: "And a good evening to you, Mr. Jessop, sir."

Her husband silenced her with a glance of anger to which the saddler's wife was too ready to add her expression of contempt; but he looked up at the latter with a quick scorn which fell equally heavily on the stout little man at her elbow.

"You take great risks," said the saddler, not at all maliciously but in friendly warning, "wooding where it is forbid. Our acquaintance in gaiters crossed not half a mile back."

"I dip my bucket in the sea," replied the other. "Where's the harm in that?"

"None to my mind," the saddler readily assured him. "Yet things come so round to their ears," he persisted, "and what with the dog there, they might stretch a point to make out a mighty troublesome case of it."

"Things so come to everybody's ears about me," retorted the drover, correcting him pointedly, "that what with the bitch there they might make out many a case and still be liars."

He spoke with vehemence and went white while the others coloured. The saddler looked down the road to escape the high displeasure with which his wife now favoured him.

The little woman was kneeling in patience beside the faggots. When her eyes were not downcast they passed timidly from her husband to the saddler, but never to the woman.

"Come," said the saddler, "neighbours have the same road."

The drover grasped the rope that tied the faggots.

His wife was not equal to this emergency. She turned round, stooped with her hands on her knees and prepared her back for the burden. It was all the more ludicrous because she was left standing so. The saddler's wife could not withhold a glance of malice, and the drover with a black look swung the faggots onto his own back and strode after the saddler.

This order was not maintained. The tall man walked with an angry, immoderate stride, and the short-legged, corpulent saddler soon fell a pace or two behind, making pretence of consideration for the neglected fourth of the party. He uttered hearty expressions of commiseration or encouragement in a hollow manner which betrayed the discomfort within him. At the same time his handsome spouse advanced to the front so confidently that the drover, without taking to his heels, could not have shaken her off. He showed his resentment by remaining silent, or, when he spoke, by his scorn. His cold and neutral manner did not leave him; whenever his dog was out of touch he interrupted his companion's speech by emitting his birdlike whistle, just as if he were alone.

He was a stiff-necked man, darkly jealous for his repute. Labouring hard and living austerely, expressing himself in few and never foul words, avoiding alike church and tavern, touching his hat to neither man nor woman, it was said of him that he was born simple but had the authority of gentry, whereby was

raised but not answered the question of his origin; and when people remarked that he was more abroad with his dog than at home with his wife, they meant that this, in the circumstances, was only reasonable. He gave no heed to mankind, so long as that herd, he said, did not encroach on his pasture. And the saddler's wife touched him to the quick of anger, in general because her responsiveness to his individual dignity endowed her with the power to make him more aware of his poverty, in particular because the recent coupling of her name with his own in the speculation of the village set up a menace to his isolation, his cherished inviolability.

When they entered the street, the saddler's wife looked cool and unhurried. They made a noteworthy pair, walking abreast, both tall and resolute persons. By this time the saddler was ten yards behind and was talking over his shoulder to the drover's wife, who kept saying, "Yes, Mr. Jessop, sir," and "No, Mr. Jessop, sir," but knew her place too well to take an intelligent part in any conversation. Besides, her eyes were fixed on the couple in front as if she saw there a diminishing hope about to pass out of her sight for ever.

"My wife was just wondering to-day," called Mr. Jessop to the drover's wife, "whether it wouldn't be troubling you too much to let her have her things back tomorrow."

The drover, although he had hitherto appeared to take no interest in his surroundings, turned his head at this and answered for his wife.

"Tonight," he said.

People standing at their doors or leaning out of their windows watched the procession come to its destination. The drover at once entered his cottage, the dog at his heels. The saddler's wife, on the other hand, had to wait for her husband, who evidently kept at least the keys of his own castle. The

drover's wife, after saying "Good-night, ma'am, good-night, Mr. Jessop, sir," to the other door as it closed, turned to her own.

It so happened. The drover, evidently assuming that she had gone through to the yard, at that moment slammed the front door in her face. Obedient even to this minor course of fate, she disappeared by the side path that led to the back of the cottage.

When she came into the kitchen her husband was rekindling the dying fire with fircones. Quite unaware of his brutality, he remained thus preoccupied, kneeling, indeed, to blow into the embers.

The woman, as if conceived and born in distress, had the sense of calamity in her very marrow and she trembled simply at sight of his long, powerful back. Short-sighted as she was, she saw at all times only so much of her circumstances as terrified her.

The kitchen was neither orderly nor clean, even though it bore witness to the attempt of an overawed intelligence to achieve a balance between what might be the needs of a singular man and what might be the needs of an equally singular dog. To-day, in contrast to the disorder and stain below, the room displayed against its blackened ceiling all the gala effects of washing day. On the two ropes stretched from iron hooks in the walls hung the white laundry of their neighbour, the saddler's lady. When the drover arose, after starting the first blaze and reinforcing it with a few short, split billets, he found his head amongst a cloud of the fine linen underwear which, though the fact was as yet unknown save here and in the house next door, distinguished Mrs. Jessop from all other women in the village: every article of which was embroidered in some corner with a monogram in red silk, every article of which,

even in this dead state, flaunted in his face its intrinsic coquetry.

The drover's wife, to whose obscure spirit every task was at once an act of necessity, an act of desperation and an act of faith, realised now what she had been doing.

"Get all that trash down," said the drover then, "and take it next door and be paid for it, and tell its owner from me, she can take her custom elsewhere."

SAMARKAND

by

Martha Foley

Curious people. Mrs. Pickens' thoughts escaped to the wide, tree-shaded Cambridge street on which orderly people and her own orderly self resided and then came back again among the drab crowds on Tsverskaya. Real peasant, that man. Blank blue eyes and dandelion hair. But the other black one, a Tartar. It did women good not to have any styles. See how the faces of those girls came out, warm with thoughts, under men's caps. Would never look like that under a cloche. Or were Russian girls different anyway? Brief cases, brief cases. Like Boston bags of lawyers and teachers on Beacon Street. What in the world do they carry in them? Here, not there. There, of course, the bags held books and briefs and neat rolls of paper, things to be exposed to snug little children in schoolrooms or presented to His Honor the judge in a subdued court. These interminable brief cases of Moscow carried by every Tom, Dick and — no, it would be every Ilytch, Sascha and Leon — what they held must be Documents, party papers, proclamations, manifestoes, disciplinary orders, lists. Though the one she saw opened in the street car the other day contained only a roll and a piece of sausage. All Russian streets should have been made with the sidewalks the widest part of them. Even then probably they

couldn't possibly hold all these people who were going and coming heavens knows where. Christmas streets in Boston never knew such crowds as swarmed in Moscow day and night.

Like the crowds and her thoughts, Mrs. Pickens kept on going. She had to get that bread and caviar and lemon or she would have only tea — all they served in the hotel — for breakfast. Caviar for breakfast. That was more like what she expected of this trip to Samarkand. All her life she had fruit and bacon and eggs for breakfast except the Sunday morning baked beans and brown bread, or codfish cakes. Mrs. Pickens' lips gave the little one-sided twist that was her smile. What would the waiter in the Parker House dining room say if she should order caviar for breakfast?

That was why she of all people was here. She had tired of all things at home. Of baths in the morning and dressing for dinner, of running the settlement and of organizing drives, of being a good mother to her daughter and a good mother-in-law to her Harvard professor son-in-law, of Boston and Cambridge and all.

Of course she might never have broken away if she had not run into Alice. Alice who used to be a dreamer and a poet, the worst idler in the school when they were young together. A little quiver ran up Mrs. Pickens' spine when she thought of what had happened to Alice. She hadn't seen her for years until that day she ran into her at the faculty tea. Alice was back from the west where she was dean of women at a state university. She, who in her own schooldays had been such an imp, now regimenting a swarm of girls! It was funny but it was sad. The pale hair that used to fall in untamed strands over her eyes was clipped and brushed straightly into place. The soft green-brown eyes that flowed away somewhere half the time she was talking, had hardened into bright efficient

discs. And her hands that were always drifting kept their place firmly gripped on purse and book. Even her clothes had changed. Alice's petticoats used to hang and her blouse collar was rumpled. This Alice who was so important a personage at the university tea was smoothly gowned with every accessory what it should be and no loose threads or specks.

Mrs. Pickens remembered she felt as if somebody had died. Alice with her wildness and her verses and her careless ways had meant escape. Yet Alice had been caught.

If this was what life did, it was better sometimes to die. It made Mrs. Pickens think about Mrs. Pickens. She herself had never been the free lovable creature the pre-dean Alice was. It had been easier to catch her.

Mrs. Pickens thought back to the sort of young person she had been. She remembered how she chased around to political meetings, to woman suffrage rallies, to demonstrations for the Czar's Siberian prisoners. She wrote in some friend's Future Book that her ambition was to be the first woman president. A silly idea. If she could, she wouldn't be any such thing now.

The thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts. There was the time when the soft-eyed Alice, who would have turned driftingly away from the hard-eyed Alice, said that all she wanted was an island in purple tropical seas where she could lie and watch the waves make lace.

"The tropics will not be enough for me," the very young girl Mrs. Pickens had been then, said. "I am going to travel around the whole world before I die. I am going to France and Italy, Africa and China, I am going everywhere. I am even going to Samarkand!"

"Samarkand!" the wistful Alice half sung the word. "Samarkand!"

Years ago, before she had been married, before her children had come and grown, before she had built the biggest settlement in Boston, she had been going to Samarkand. Well, now she was going. After all these years she had broken away. The children had made no objection. Mother can take care of herself. Yes, Mother always took care of everthing.

"Why, Mother will even take care of Samarkand!" her daughter laughed.

Mrs. Pickens turned into the Komminar, the huge cooperative grocery shop. Sensible things, these cooperative enterprises. Only she would like to teach them something about diet. Too much fatty meat, too much starch, not enough vitamins. She had worked wonders with the people at the settlement. It was impossible to change the older ones, of course, but the younger ones were eating much more salad and drinking much more milk. Their babies showed it. Now, diet was one of the things these Russians were overlooking. Important, too. Could be put in their Five Year Plan.

Mrs. Pickens went expertly from caviar counter to fruit counter to the bakery department. Caviar, great spoons of it, for breakfast.

She must take all this back to the hotel and then go down to the performance of the Blue Blouses. Art out of the factory. She wanted to find out about this. There were many things she must find out about here in Russia. It was an invaluable laboratory for the social service worker. The directors of her own settlement wouldn't like to know she thought that, but she could manage them. She wanted to see one of these ideal factories, and she was going to visit a second and third cooperative apartment house before making up her mind and she wanted to study the workings of the peasants' centre where the farmers and their wives and their children came

for advice and there was the marriage and divorce systems and the five-day week and the social insurance and the maternity protection and the public health clinics. Mrs. Pickens' hands busily set her hat straighter, buttoned and unbuttoned her coat and fussed with her parcel.

She was back in her hotel. A smaller place than the Grand or the Metropole down near the many budding domes of the Kremlin. This hotel had probably been for upper middle class travelers before the war. Now it was given over almost entirely to delegates to the Third International. It was an accident that Mrs. Pickens was there. She had heard someone mention the name of the place and gave it to the taxi-driver who drove her all around the city before arriving at the hotel. Mrs. Pickens still ached executively when she thought of that taxi-driver. And to think she was so dazed when she did leave his shabby vehicle that she had paid him his nine dollars charge! At first they didn't want her in the hotel but after she gave several well known revolutionary names as references they agreed to let her have a room. The room was a tiny one, with an iron bed, a cupboard, a chair and a desk. It was clean if stark and Mrs. Pickens didn't mind it.

There were a lot of things Mrs. Pickens did mind. She minded that the modern porcelain wash basin with its nickel taps had no sink stopper. She had told the hotel people how they could devise temporary stoppers pending the time when the Five Year Plan would provide regular ones.

"Now, if you take a large cork, you know a regular cork such as would fit in a large bottle, and whittle it down, I am sure you would have a very satisfactory temporary stopper," she told the hotel manager. He promised to take it up with the hotel soviet of chambermaids and clerks and janitors which

directed the place but the hot water still ran down the black holes in the basins.

Mrs. Pickens minded the way the peasant delegates used the toilets. She quite approved when she heard that some of the party members in their volunteer social work chose to show Russians how to use toilets. She would like to do it herself.

She minded, too, all the broken windows in Moscow. It was the first thing she noticed. Shop windows, home windows, office windows, rippled with cracks or gouged out.

"Why is it there are so many broken windows?" she asked. The Russians were surprised. Were there many broken windows? They had never noticed. Some thought they might have been broken in the revolutionary fighting, some said it was looters, some said it was the intense winter cold.

After a while she saw the broken windows were all in the old buildings. The new ones had shining intact windows. They might have no time for the old, Mrs. Pickens told herself, but still this was a most impracticable way of doing things. Those old buildings would have to stand there for some time yet and they might as well be kept in repair. She had told the Russians that but again they looked surprised.

The Russians were always looking surprised. It seemed many very obvious things had never occurred to them. As for instance when Mrs. Pickens told them that their streets should be watered to keep down the dust.

"Pushkin boulevard would be a beautiful street but for the dust," she said. "With its wide parkway and the lovely old Monastery of the Passion. It's a magnificent thoroughfare but I always avoid it whenever I can because of the dust that blows in my eyes. That dust spreads germs, too, you know, as well as getting in your eyes. Why don't you have watering carts?"

When the Russians told her they had never noticed the dust and that anyway the snow kept the dust down in winter, Mrs. Pickens explained that after all the dry season was a long one, too, and she would be glad to draw them a picture of a watering cart so they could make some. They could get all the water they needed from the Moscow river. They hadn't been enthusiastic.

The Russians were a slow people. They swaddle their babies, said Mrs. Pickens. Swaddled races are always backward.

There was really a lot to be done with Russia and the Russians. If I could be Stalin for a couple of years I know all sorts of things I would change. Her fingers were busy again with hair and collar and buttons. And I'll always say this for the Bolsheviks, no one who has never been to Russia can ever appreciate that all they got from the Czar was the land and the people. Nothing, nothing in between.

Mrs. Pickens went to the Blue Blouses' performance. A pity that she couldn't understand the language but the performance seemed to be excellent in its way. There were a few things to be corrected, however. She would like to tell a couple of the actors never to turn their backs on the audience. That was one of the fundamentals of acting the dramatics director at the settlement always impressed upon the Community Players. Nor should that girl have worn those heavy shoes with that short skirt. Very incongruous. Mrs. Pickens clapped loudly at the end of each act. One should always be encouraging when people were trying.

* * *

Mrs. Pickens had never been so busy in all her life as those first months in Moscow. Not even that first year at the settlement where there was so much to be done, funds raised, assistants hired, programs outlined and worst, the neighborhood

people to be brought into line. They had to be told and told how good the settlement was for them. Moscow was like that.

She had planned to stay only a week in Moscow. Samarkand was a long way by slow train from there and she had made inquiries about arrangements the first day she arrived in Moscow. She hadn't known then she would be so busy.

There was that trip to the Kremlin. It showed how little the state travel bureau knew about handling tourists. A whole group of them had been kept waiting an hour for the person who was to take them to the Kremlin. It was such a simple thing to do that finally she had said, "Let's not waste time here any longer. Let's just go down to the Kremlin ourselves."

A few of the group hadn't liked the idea. But that silly boy, what was his name, who said he was going through Russia doing as many crazy things as possible. Not because he was crazy but because he wanted to write a book called *A Madcap In Russia*. He had said, "It would take a little old lady to start things going." She had told him that at home her daughter and son-in-law always said the same thing, "Oh, Mother'll take care of it." Madcap had called her "mother" after that although she was sure if he were her son he would know better than to do some of the silly things he did. Such as going up to that guard at the Kremlin and pointing to his own red star button and then that of the guard and saying, "See, I'm one, too." The guard hadn't even smiled.

Anyway they had all got into the Kremlin by themselves. The guide assigned to them was breathless from running to catch up with them. It had helped other tourists, their taking things into their own hands that way. The travel bureau never again kept her waiting.

Mrs. Pickens had found out a lot of things the Soviets themselves didn't know. After having seen the factories, and

they really were the best of their kind, one day she got lost. She was trying to find her way through a side street back to Red Square and she heard machines singing. Still another factory and while she was here she might as well see it. It wasn't at all like the other factories. It was in a tumble-down old building. The workers were crowded close together and the windows were shut. No ventilation, no working conveniences. They had been very astonished to see her come in. She hadn't inspected factories in the settlement district back home for nothing. She made them understand she had come in to look around and look around she did.

She told a lecturer on Factories-Under-The-Five-Year-Plan about what she had found. He was very interested and said he would go and look into it at once. Only she couldn't remember the name of the street or how to get there again. He assured her that every such factory was being wiped out of existence as rapidly as possible. She would like to go back in a few weeks and see.

It really was time that she was leaving for Samarkand. Whenever she looked at the starred pink and green and blue church domes, she thought of Samarkand. Against the clean blue of the Moscow sky the domes might have been in Samarkand. One couldn't always look up at church domes. Too much was to be seen closer to one. As a young girl she would have thought only of those domes, she supposed. Of the domes and the turreted walls of the red Kremlin and the barber pole fantasies of the church of Ivan the Terrible. Strange how responsibility grows with one. Alice wasn't to be blamed. No doubt that Madcap would also grow into a serious man with a sense of responsibility. Well, how else would the world get on?

Now about that peasants' centre. She wondered if they

were telling the farmers' wives to stop swaddling their children. She must look into that. Also it would be interesting to know if they were trying to change the national diet of meat and cabbage and bread.

It was lucky she had got her visa extended. The clerk hadn't wanted to much but she let him know by the efficient and at the same time kind look in her eye that she intended to get it. And it was nice of the Russians to put her on the Foreigners' Inspection Committee. Amazing how many things there were to be done here.

In a month or so she would go to Samarkand.

CATASTROPHE

by

Robert Musil

The girl had certainly just stepped out of the show-window of some big shop—so pretty were her little doll features. I sometimes think one should be allowed to grind a shoe-heel thoroughly around in such a face to give it a little originality—but one wears shoes with those soap-smooth buffalo soles and ones trousers are pressed in lines as stiff as sketches in white chalk . . .

There was rapture in the wind. It shrank the dress around the girl and made a pitiable little skeleton out of her, a stupid face with a very small mouth. A bold-faced wind. Directly from God it came, and still possessed, it seemed, with the rush of the seven days creation—the time when God blew to cool the earth and no one yet knew what would come out of it.

Between the stiff white presses and the skirts as thin as tea cups little hares lived unsuspectingly. Dark green as laurel stretched the heroism of the island around them. Flocks of seagulls squatted in the washes in the heath—borders of white snowflowers moved by the wind. The little white long-haired terrier of the young white girl, the girl with the fur around her neck, hunted through the weeds, his nose a finger

width above the earth. Far and wide on the island there is no other dog to scent. Nothing but the immense romanticism of the many, small, unknown tracks crossing and recrossing the island. The dog, gigantic in this solitude, becomes a kind of hero. Excited, sharp as a knife, he barks, baring his teeth, a sea-monster. In vain the girl screws up her tiny mouth to whistle, the wind tears from her lips whatever sound she tries to make.

With such a wire-haired fox-terrier, I have climbed glaciers; we, smoothly, on skis, he bleeding, breaking through to his belly, cut by the ice, and yet full of wild, never tiring happiness. Now he has smelled out something, his legs gallop like sticks of wood, his bark becomes a whine, a sob. Curious how such an island, floating flat on the sea, recalls the great stone-lands and plateaus in the high mountains. The skull-yellow, wind-polished dunes, set out like wraiths of rock. Between them and heaven—the emptiness of unfinished creation. Light shines neither on this nor that, but floods over everything, spilled from an upset pail. You are astonished whenever you discover that animals live in this lonesomeness. They acquire something mysterious. Little white woolen, feathery breasts that hide the spark of life. It is a little hare the terrier is driving along ahead of him. The small weather-hardened mountain kind—he will never catch him. A memory from the geography class. Island. Are we standing, in fact, on the summit of a high mountain of the sea? We, ten or fifteen, left-behind guests of the bathing resort—in our bedlam-colored jackets which fashion prescribes? The thought is rejected—the thing in common is only the non-human forsakenness. The earth, like a horse that has thrown its rider, is bewildered wherever man has not yet reached. And ill, queazy in spirit, nature shows herself in the high mountains, and on

the small island. But to our amazement the distance between the dog and the hare has decreased. The terrier catches up. You've never seen such a thing—a dog overtaking a hare! The First Great Triumph of the Dog World! Enthusiasm lends wings to the pursuer, his breath is pushed out in shots. There is no further question, he will overtake his prey within a few seconds. The hare makes a hook turn, doubling on its tracks, and then I see, in the unpractised gentleness of the swerve, it is no hare; it is only a young one, a baby hare.

My heart stops. The dog has turned with him. He lost no more than fifteen paces. In a few seconds there will be the catastrophe. The young one hears the dog behind his tiny tail. It is tired. I want to jump between them. But it takes so long before the will travels through the pressed trousers to the smooth soles . . . or perhaps the resistance was already in the mind. Twenty steps from me . . . I might have gone on dreaming, but the young hare stopped in fright and yielded its neck to its pursuer. The dog sunk his teeth in, shook the hare a couple of times, then flung it on its side and buried his jaws twice, three times, in the breast and belly.

I looked up. Laughing, heated faces pressed around. It was suddenly four o'clock in the morning, after an all-night dance . . . The first of us to awake from the blood-drunk was the little terrier. He stopped, squinted mistrustfully, and drew back. After a few paces he fell into a short run, his feet drawn close together, as if he expected a stone to come flying after him. We others, however, were motionless and embarrassed. A dull atmosphere of unspoken words surrounded us. Fight for Existence. Cruelty of Nature. Such thoughts are as if raised from the floor of the ocean, brought up from immense depths—to become shallow. I should have liked intensely to have gone back to the senseless young

girl and beaten her. It was still a sincere feeling, this, when there came, almost at once, a thought from somewhere even further . . . the unlettered savage who eats his kind, but only does so for the sake of the great secret . . . Finally, a tall, comfortable man took the hare in both hands, showed its wounds to those gathered around and, like a little coffin, carried into the kitchen of a neighboring hotel the corpse he had wrested from the dog. This man stepped forth as the first from the inexplicable and had the firm ground of Europe under his feet.

— translated from the German
by Whit Burnett.

THUNDERSTORM

by

Lawrence Vail

(1)

"What am I going to do about it? What am I going to do with myself? Oh I don't know. But I'll find out. I will but you won't. You'll never know. You never do know. But what am I going to do with you?"

"Don't worry about me," said the woman. "I can look after myself."

"You can, can you? Well, I won't stand for it. I won't. I won't."

"Mathew, don't shout. You'll wake up the children."

"Children! Why have we children? Why does anyone have children? Why was I ever a child? But I wasn't. Why can't I be a child? Why? Why? Why?"

(2)

The rage threw the flabby pulp of me out into the street. It was full of the drab ones on usual errands—pound of butter to buy, tram to stand and stand for, letter to register . . . Register! Why? Who cares? How can it matter?

Those patient people. The city needs a purge, it does, it does, and yet not one will swallow poison. Well, neither will I. Ha-ha-ha. I slap the fat of my fret with rowdy laughter. Damned if I will. Won't give the woman that satisfaction. She's snivelled enough. Too much.

Those men. Pimples, collars and stained suspenders. Those women. Middle-aged arm pits, sweating, sweating.

But I am a special one.

I am a nice one — really.

I have a thunderstorm right in my head.

God's thunderstorm.

Sly Nick's.

Not the thunderstorm of girl in Middlewest who finally smashed one kitchen plate and rolled naked in the hot bitter corn, scratching the August hail into her unappreciated intimates.

My thunderstorm is a beauty.

(3)

And what does all this lead to?

Just to this:

Sitting with a newspaper and a beer.

But I do get to the book store across the street.

But

I have read all the Edgar Wallaces.

And they say Edgar the Great writes a book a month. A book a month for the Book of the Month. But I can read more than a book a month. I won't read the *Guide Michelin*, I won't read the Well of Loneliness, I won't read the Bible, I won't read the New-York Herald, I won't read Hamlet, I won't read the time table . . . I won't, I won't, I won't . . .

(4)

What is the little woman doing? What are the women doing? The usual things. The little things. The little women do and do the little things. It is important to do this and that. Oh stop. Sit down. Relax. Do nothing. Suck your fingers, turn off the pigeon holing. Sit on your feet. Just stop . . .

Meanwhile the children are sleeping. Their little faces . . . Their tiny fists . . . I hope I am going to cry . . . "Waiter, a lachrymatory drink. They're all drunk up, you say? Well then, an Edgar Wallace cocktail."

(5)

There is a chute that slides one home to kisses. The hangdog make-up and then to bed and dead. Morning: I grab routine and hug it. And here I am in the family way, writing away, away, away; a tale a day, and will it pay? "Children, go up the chimney if you must blow that trumpet. Your father is rather a writer."

Ink-sick, I fret awake, foolscapt into a stupor. The little woman is doing things.

"Pigeon, why do you do things?"

"These things have to be done, my dove."

"But this thing, sweet duck. Has it got to be done?"

"Indeed, it has, my peacock. It has to be done some time."

"But why this time, sweet hen?"

"Oh, darling ostrich, do let me do this thing this time because this time is the time to do this thing this time."

I bang a chaos. Out of it I pick up a red rag, and, flag-like, wave it. I am the bull. I am the rag. The little woman just looks on and does things.

"This is not true," I yell. "The truth is something else—or nothing. I'm going away from all this. I'm going to love a woman of the streets. Right on the streets. And then I'm going. On a boat to be love sick. To darkest Africa where the only beautiful women of the world wobble and wobble-wobble. For a woman should wobble. That's why she's here, to wobble when she's told to."

She does things.

"Come, chick, a little wobble. I'm going if you don't wobble. I'm going, really I'm going . . ."

(6)

Going? I am going. I do go. But — where does one go to? There's Nature. Takes time to go there, and by that time — why go there? No matter, I shall go there. And here I am — I like it. Tree — I like the way you stand, solemn, not sullen. Grass — you make all beds stink. There is something in you, O Sun — that bulb and steam heat have not got. All my life I will stay here. Oh we (Nature and I) we understand each other. All my life — but is it possible that I have been here only one hour?

Luke is the village beer. Those magnificent village types bore me like roots or sky or goat turd. I shall not sleep among the udders of the milkmaid. I might stay longer, only, well, you see, I did not bring a detective story.

"Stop, Mister Chauffeur, stop. Take all my money but drive me to the city."

Now back I am in the familiar soot and hubbub. I sip, waiting for city lights and what not. The same ones pass, or stop: men buttoned down the front, women so pendulous beneath the flop of shirt, children squatting on doggy's sand-heap . . .

(7)

I ached for money and when it came I was invested by hotel porters. Having built a house on the top of the desert overlooking the Mediterranean I wouldn't live in it and left it. When I turned neurotic I played my wife against the doctors and the doctors against my wife, but as I always won the game became so monotonous that I grew more neurotic. I was sulking down Vichy when my wife had to leave me and I took to

drink and it certainly did agree with me. I talked and talked and drank and talked and everybody was bored except myself but I was tremendously diverted. Every year for a great many years I wrote a book and one day in a train I read one. I travelled expensively and was often glad to be back in the old place when I had been too long in the new. And one of those days who should I meet on just a street but

my own daughter

a grown girl who shaved her arm pits.

"Hello. To think I used to put you on the pot. You were round tummied and flat breasted. Remember the old joke about Lake Titicaca? Your mother was an irritating woman. Wonder what happened to her? Don't tell me. Don't tell me."

(8)

I was not appetizing to look at, and my daughter's little nose closed and sniffed up, up, up, saying: dad has haliotosis. Surrounded by things that flatter a pompous man: contempt, friends that behaved like servants, not a friend -- I had a smug and certain standing. But I missed something. Oh, where, where is it, this thing I've lost:

My Thunderstorm.

"Oh, give me my thunderstorm, please, God, do. Let them all be angry again when I am nasty. Let me feel angry and not just nasty . . ."

"Mother," my daughter was saying, "is a saint."

(9)

Woman who will be saints forever are always waiting for employment. I go to the agency: "Get me a saint." I put an ad in the paper: "Old gent wants saint to hate, etc."

"Good woman, you are so kind, so nice and kind, so kind."

"Mathew, I try to do my best."

"You do, do you? Why can't you do your worst? Oh, curse you."

"My love, why so excited?"

"I'm not excited. I want my thunderstorm. Where is it?"

I throw a footstool at the cabinet of Wedgwood. I smash the majolica, I tear the Gobelins, I make kindling wood out of the Chippendale. I crack the Dresden shepherdess, I spit on an old master.

"Please, Mathew. You'll have one of your weak spells."

"Damn you. I'm having it."

But I am rich and she is kind and knows just where to get things. To-morrow there will be no more Wedgwood in the flat. The shepherdess will be glued. My saliva will dry on the old master.

I want my thunderstorm. But why smash? My beauty is not in these poor works of art.

"Saint, take me to the Louvre on a litter. I want to slap Mona Lisa. An axe. I want to behead, bebreast, beleg the Venus of Milo. I want to bewing the Winged Victory."

(10)

"My love, do try and drink down this cup of tilleul."

"I won't. I won't. Take it away or I'll smash . . ."

I want my thunderstorm

Give me my thunderstorm

Where is my thunderstorm

Give me my thunderstorm — I want it.

DARK VICTORY

by

Jay J. Dratler

As she lounged in the rocking chair, Mary Lynn felt the presence of a sweetness she had never known before; one of those moods that envelop fragility in the softness of surrender.

She was tilted back; her legs stretched before her, limply curved. Her body heeded no call of her easily-swayed emotions and a gentle numbness caressed her. She gave herself to the tenderness of reverie. But her hair seemed alive in the sunlight and her eyes, wistful with unimaginable secrets, shone coolly.

From behind her, echoing through the great, empty rooms of the house, came the leisurely, mellow chanting of the gibbous negro maid. The rich, husky voice floated tenuously with the hot winds. Beside her was a glass of lemonade. Beneath the shielding fullness of entwined vines and trellises, through which a menacing sun pierced vagrant, dusty lines into the shade, she was drowsily happy.

The absence of any emotion in this pungent scorching was a relief. She felt no desire for this or that, no fear or uncertainty, bore no malice, forgave everything in the enervating heat of the afternoon. Tomorrow she would be Mrs. Donald Keane. She would be freed from her father. And above all, she

would be free of her passion for a negro, a passion that had bloomed like a rose, wounded with its thorns, and given her boundless joy and grief indiscriminately.

The dark cloud that was the negro settled itself stubbornly over her mind. Peace was gone.

Back in the past, through the meagre years of despair and bits of straggling laughter blown to the stray winds, she saw a slender, pig-tailed child sunk in grass and yellow buttercups, humming a tune into the fresh gusts of autumn. She heard again the snort of the bull, heard a warning cry, felt strong, skinny arms grip her roughly and toss her over the fence to safety. And then the dead silence and the negro-boy lying grotesquely motionless in her flowery garden . . . Her introduction to Brandy.

And days and nights had followed, that grew into unforget-
gotten years of companionship, thoughts and desires alike—a
white landowner's daughter and his negro cotton-picker's son.
He had come to her before she was anything but physically
born and he had grown into her young mind, made himself a
vital part of her life. She had watched the burly grace of his
maturing body, the lion's beauty of his face; heard his mel-
ancholy hymns and seen the devotion in his dark brown eyes as
they searched through her. She knew his ambitions and had
learned to forgive him his failings.

He had slipped through the formal pattern of her, crept
into her like a dark guilt, and had absorbed every budding
thought that was not of him. And she had loved him for
four years before she was told that she was a big girl now
and would have to stop "foolin' with niggers." Her heart had
told her that there was something inexplicably wrong with
the order. She had refused to obey it. But many beatings,
many lashings with the same riding crop that had ruined so

many of her father's beautiful horses, taught her that her father must be obeyed - even if only outwardly. One must not be seen mingling with niggers, especially if one was of the Clements!

When she was old enough to travel about unchaperoned, she learned that negroes were taboo. She decided that her affair with Brandy must cease and she resisted with every strength in her. At each new meeting she showed him that she had forgottn a little, but in the privacy of her mind she knew that she remembered more. Deep within her, the power of him, the simple faith of him told her that there was no escape. From the sensual depth of her, she knew she wanted him. When he looked at her, she trembled against the feeling that possessed her, that let her bowels drop and leave sharp emptiness.

"He's not like them, he's like *me*. He's mine!"

But white lives, white views, white laws had planted the seed of prejudice somewhere in her. Recurrent births of a short-lived hatred for him were plaguing her.

"He'll always be a nigger and I'll always be white; *that* can't be changed."

She had jerked madly about, straining at the bonds of her craving flesh and the call of his. She had wanted to catch all the snarled strands of her life's loom and tear his ugliness from it. But his passive strength was beyond her endurance.

Her father more cruel than paternal, she had gone to the only other savior. "O, God, I love this man! Is it wrong? Is there something wrong with me? Is he not like other men? Is he not worthier beneath his black skin? I love him, God. Help me!"

And from the North had come Donald Keane, the great, the lovable. He had seen the entralling Brandy and had sensed immediately the conflict between them. He had helped her marshall all the frail forces within her unwilling self to avert the tragedy that he thought was imminent.

She had cared for him more at first from fear of the consequences of her passion for Brandy than from genuine affection, but he had won her away from her dark Nemesis. He had given her no time to think of herself, of Brandy, no time to think of anyone but Donald Keane, of anything but the concerns of Donald Keane. She loved him now. She would be pure and white, and, finally, safe and at peace. She had some notions of the purity of her strain from her father's admonitions, "The Clements are fighters and we keep our blood clean!"

A horse clumped slowly into the roadway and she looked up from her rocker as John Clement began to shout. "Mary Lynn! Daughter! What the devil are you doing? Come here at once!"

She stared through the intertwined stalks at the drunken figure that wallowed up the path. His face was bloated and blue with emotion, heat, and liquor. He began to speak. She heard only the clarity, the death-dealing pain of his first words.

"Keane is dead! Keane is dead! Shot by a hunter over yonder to Bollin'. Shot dead. Keane dead. Wouldn't have none of our fine fellows around here, eh? Took a damn Yankee. Well, he's dead now. No weddin' at all!"

* * *

Beyond the field the sun had sunk, pillow'd on cumulous clouds. Like a huge pumpkin it had lolled over the waters of the Mississippi, with the greedy, mud-messed waves lapping hungrily at its edge. Down on the opposite horizon, just above the

volute of blue smoke that curled from the stark housetop, a line of stars already stretched across the sky. The sun, the light, and the clouds retreated from the heavens before the coming of darkness.

Trees with uplifted arms grew colder—tall, solid, and uncompromising, and yet so delicately tinted by time, so softened by wandering vines and hanging grasses, that their very ruggedness was benevolent. Between rows of cotton-plants stood the mawkish silhouettes of the pickers, forming a landscape, a chiaroscuro of negroid skins and swollen whiteness. Their dark torsos bent in lusty, easy-swinging freedom; dirty, worn trousers and shoddy gingham dresses were losing their drab colors in the soft smoothness of an exotic twilight. The inevitable, oozing speed of the river rippled to the earthy gusto of their lugubrious, slave-song rhythms. Sounds mingled into a harmony of brittle leaves crunching beneath strong fingers; sing-song phrases; grunts of gravid women; faintly rustling trees; squishing of feet in soft earth; and the plangent bird-trills from new nests in dense foliage. Shouts and belly-acheings; smelly, sweaty odors combining with the fragrance of warmed flowers and hot, spicy winds from the river; stomachs quaking with laughter at indecent jokes; twisted philosophies aired in the open; backyard scandal; work; and a blistering earth underfoot. Black as the rufous soil that gives them work, happy toilers in the vineyard of the Lord, sheep in his pasture, "O, Lawd," and the rim of the earth enclosing them forever.

And into the half-lit peace stumbled Mary Lynn, exhausted. From behind the concealing screen of thick bushes, her cries clung to the slow breeze and sailed lazily down into the cotton field. The negroes, homeward bound, glanced at the sombre figure of Brandy, who yearned anguishedly toward

the grassy hillock. He turned wearily to his laden sack and walked toward his cabin.

High on the rolling hill that overlooked the plantation, she threw herself on the peaceful bosom of the earth, wildly embracing the bole of an oak tree. Her face and breasts pressed into the warm soil that drank her tears . . . and her feet thrashed against its firmness.

"O, God of me, O, just and kind God, why hast thou forsaken me? Now I know that I love him. He is good and he is great. He placed me on a pedestal and worshipped me, but kept his two hands on my feet to keep me warm. He wrapped himself around my mind and let no evil or hurt into it—he gave me his love. He took my hurt heart out of my whipped body and kissed it and soothed it . . . Oh, God, I want him!"

"And my father, my beastly father, must I honor him? I honor my mother, but I despise him! He . . . he has beaten me without cause in his drunken rages, beaten me so that I crawled into my shell in pain, curled up inside to guard myself from his rottenness . . . and he jeered and mocked . . . and still I had pity. I took Donald Keane to please *him*, not to bring sorrow on his ageing head; and he has torn up my little world by the roots and flung it away . . . he has lashed down into the hollows of my heart and my blood stains the whole world . . . he has murdered Keane! Oh, my God, the way is smooth beneath my feet now . . . I know your will!"

Across the field, the night blended into a dim background from which the only reality that emerged was one that stood out boldly in her mind. She rose and darted down the slope. One hand held to her breasts. She cut through the dark, knowing by instinct the way . . .

FOG

by

Carter Brooke Jones

I

Freda looked up a trifle impatiently as John Purvin approached the piano during an intermission, smiling in his ineffectual way, his soft blue eyes gleaming faintly through his spectacles. She returned his smile, but sighed to herself. It wasn't that she didn't like him—quite the contrary—but she wished that he would be one thing or the other, assume some definite attitude, quit hovering between the impersonal and the intimate. Better for him to stay away from her than to keep this up. Yet he was so like a child, she had to laugh. She had encouraged him—subtly. She was not in the habit of throwing herself at anyone. Besides, she didn't greatly care.

It was time to play again. She beckoned the studious-looking saxophone player. She banged a cord. John Purvin slipped away to dance with a girl he had just met. Freda watched his thin, graceful figure as it swayed in and out of the cluster of couples that choked the small floor. She flashed critical glances at the girl. Not bad looking, nor yet anything to rave over.

Then, as her fingers jazzed mechanically, she looked over the rest of the Saturday night crowd. Cattoni's was getting cheap, she mused. She thought of its past glories, when San Francisco's most sparkling personalities were reputed to have gathered

there: artists, writers, musicians, connoisseurs, traveled men, resplendent women. Look at it now! A handful of the old guard, a few patrons of talent and charm, but mostly a clientèle on the level of that tall couple circling the piano. She was a faded-out blonde, who chewed gum with amazing vitality, and he looked like a burglar.

Her skepticism intervened. After all, had Cattoni's been such a grand and gorgeous place in the Good Old Days? Probably, at the least, they exaggerated. Past eminence was claimed for every one of the older resorts in Little Italy. She had her doubts. One always longed for the years gone, and soon they became legendary.

At the next intermission Purvin returned.

"I understand," he said, leaning over her, "that you're nousepartyng at the Finleys in Sausalito. So am I. I told Ruth Finley I couldn't get over until late, and she suggested I bring you over on the last boat. How about it?"

"Fine," she purred, with a sly smile.

"Well, we'll have plenty of time after closing to make the boat," he added.

"Oh, sure." She gazed at him so steadily that he reddened and turned away. She laughed. She felt that she looked well tonight. And that was something. She didn't always, these days. Scant sleep and whipped nerves were making her no comelier, and the years were making her no younger. Yet sometimes she was darkly alluring—perhaps tonight. The Spanish shawl helped, she thought. At other times she looked pinched, fatigued . . . almost old. She shuddered at the fancy of days that must come.

II

As they started out, Irving Watts waylaid them. Freda thought him something of a pest. He insisted that they stop

by his place in the old Montgomery Block—he called it a studio, of course. Since they had time to kill, she consented. Irving Watts was a former salesman, now publisher of a trade paper. He was just discovering Bohemians and Liberals. Freda used to remark that if he kept on, he'd find out all about roller-skating rinks and tandem-bicycles and wasp waists. The decayed room in the Montgomery Block that he kept for entertainment was aggressively atmospheric. It even had a shrine to Buddha, in an alcove, with incense usually issuing from it. The drapes were Chinese, straight from Grant Avenue. His talk was fatuous. And yet he was so good-natured and his liquor was so excellent that she could forgive him—sometimes.

The three of them—Freda and John Purvin and Irving Watts—lounged in the affected room, and sipped real chartreuse. Irving talked, and Freda leaned back on the lounge in a carefully attentive attitude. John tried to look interested, and failed. He was horribly bored. Yet he liked the chartreuse: he said it reminded him of his days at the Sorbonne.

The time slipped by. After all, they were comfortable, and Irving's talk—something about Real Freedom for the Individual—droned on like some extraneous sound to which one has become accustomed and heeds only now and then. Finally John, who had been dozing, moved with a jerk and looked at his watch.

"Freda, do you know what time it is?"

She smiled sweetly. "I haven't the faintest idea, John, I've been so absorbed in what Irving was saying."

"Well, it's ten to one," John announced, "and we've missed the last boat."

"That's a fine note!" she exclaimed mildly.

"Ruth'll be disappointed," he added. "Of course we can phone."

"Let's see," she pondered. "Oh, I have it! There's a paper boat, a launch, at three o'clock. It carries a few passengers when they happen to be around. We could take it."

"It might do," he said doubtfully. "Would you mind?"

"I think it's fun. I've taken it before."

John Purvin pulled out his watch again and held it before him, as if expecting time to change miraculously.

"Probably we're keeping Irving up," he suggested.

"Not a bit of it," Irving assured him. "I'd stay up anyway. I'm just getting wide awake. These are the best hours of the twenty-four for me. My thoughts seem to flow along better than in the daytime. It's a queer thing. I was just about to observe . . ."

III

The launch waited beneath them, its top lights barely above the wharf. Bulky bundles of Sunday papers were sent thudding into the rear deck space as husky young men unloaded a truck. Their figures loomed vaguely under the hazy dock lights. Beyond the launch the lights of a ship glided into the fog and vanished as if snuffed out.

The bundles heaped high on the little deck, the truck drove away. The Embarcadero, with its pungent odors of tar and salt and rotting wood, its flavors of the Seven Seas, lay for a moment like the mirage of a seaport. Then the illusion was broken by shrill cries far down the waterfront, toward the China Basin, as some vessel was unloaded. It was a night in February, mildly chill. The early spring of the Coastal region already had brought out myriads of wildflowers on the Sausalito hills and in the Santa Clara Valley.

A voice called: "All right, climb in!"

They were the only passengers. He lowered himself carefully on the swaying ladder, and helped her down. The

back deck overflowed with the cargo of papers. They could have sat in the cabin, but they preferred the tiny front deck. The craft was navigated from a diminutive chart room above the cabin.

The fog, with typical freakishness, lay far out in the bay; it had not touched the city—probably it would creep in before morning—and big patches of water had escaped it. The launch backed out of the slip, and chugged forward, gathering speed until it made all of eight knots.

Freda pulled her dark, fur-collared coat around her, and John turned up the collar of his overcoat. As the little boat cut the restless water, spray began to sting them.

"Maybe we'd better go in," John suggested half-heartedly.

"I adore it," said Freda. "Do you want to go in?"

"Not I."

He savored the ocean with deep breaths, and held out his face for the spray to fleck.

She squeezed his arm, and began to chatter playfully.

"This beats the class room at Berkeley, eh, Professor Purvin?"

"It does," he agreed, "but if you call me professor again, I'll chuck you overboard."

"But you are a professor."

"I'm not, damn it, I'm only an instructor."

"Well, you will be," she persisted.

"I suppose so," he admitted disconsolately, "I don't see a chance to escape it, unless I go in for business or something else useful and generally admired."

"When'll you be professor and doctor and all that?"

"When I get my Ph. D., if I ever do."

"You'll get it soon, won't you?"

"Next year, I hope . . . I'm supposed to hope."

"You have to do a lot of special research work and write an original thesis and all that to get a Ph. D., don't you?"

He conceded that. But he refused to discuss the latest theories of the Atom: it was his night off.

Their talk trailed away, and a long silence settled over them. It was an understanding silence, without a trace of constraint.

A great shadow loomed above the adjacent shore—Telegraph Hill—and then they passed close to the pin-point lights of Fishermen's Wharf: swarthy men swinging lanterns, preparing to move out to sea with the dawn. Behind, the hazy lights of San Francisco faded. The fog reached out for them with ghostly tentacles.

He put an arm around her—perfunctorily, she thought. He had kissed her now and then, but always in a detached way. Yet she could not believe that he was altogether cold. No, fire smoldered in the man, but it was not she who could fan it into flame. After all, what did it matter? If she couldn't share his inner thoughts, his perplexities and his dreams, she wanted nothing. Casual contacts with others, perhaps, but not with him. She didn't know why. And what she longed for vaguely couldn't happen: she wasn't his sort. One couldn't fool him; he was thorough. The bits of culture she had absorbed in her wanderings were too fragmentary and disordered to form a basis of congeniality. He was an ascetic. He would venture out of his cell only to commune with one of his kind. She imagined the sort of woman who might lure him out. It would be somebody like Ruth Finley, brilliant, well-read, assured. Why did a woman like Ruth waste time on her? Freda shrugged. There must be some things about her endurable to a superior person. Perhaps she dared hope.

Her face burned under the lash of the spray, and she felt a strange exultation. The launch was swallowed by the fog. Deep whistles, ominously staccato, filled the opaque atmosphere. The launch raised its feeble, plaintive voice.

They might have been lost in ultimate space, souls adrift, blown by eternal winds toward an unknown fate. Was there some sort of a God? There must be Something. Or else how could all this have come to be—patterns, schemes, causes and effects? But were people judged? She shook her head. A just God would hesitate: people were such puny things. An intelligent God would hardly bother: their concerns were so trivial. But some things were certain, not to be escaped. There was death, whatever its aftermath. Worse, there was old age. When you were young, you felt that everything would last forever. And then youth began slipping away, and a gaunt, hard look came, and a wrinkling skin, and for the first time you entertained the possibility that some day dissolution would set in.

She shuddered at her thoughts. She felt herself clutched, held with astonishing strength. And she shivered again, this time with sheer delight. He pressed his hands against her cold, glowing cheeks. Then he pulled her face close to him, and pressed his lips against hers, lingeringly. He released her, but she held out her arms, and they clung to each other, gently, understandingly. Neither spoke. They sat, with a life-preserver for a cushion, on the bottom of the shallow deck, their backs against the built-in bench. The tip of a wave sluiced their faces unheeded.

She had a sudden desire to kill the skipper and head straight out to sea. How did one work those instruments? A launch like this should be easy to run. There was a compass, she knew. You could just head northwest and you'd find the

Golden Gate eventually. But how did boats ever keep from hitting each other in a fog like this?

Her fancies drifted. Snatches of things came to her. She remembered the Sonoma Valley on a moonlit night with the peach trees in blossom. Ballet girls dancing for the cold moon-god. Cold. She nestled against John. He too was lost in some dream. She could call back the heavy fragrance of the acres of blossoms. It was sweet until it hurt.

Music. The Revolutionary Etude. Cortot. The Fourth Ballade: ecstasies that formed like sea-foam and dissolved as quickly . . . The Symphony, playing the Brahms Fourth, with Papa Hertz wielding his baton as if it were a delicate creature he feared to hurt . . . Jazz: the stuff she played. Tinkle, tinkle, crash. Stale odors of tobacco, of whiskey, of food. Stale talk, loud laughter.

She touched John's cold cheek. No need for him to tell her. She could feel it all, the thing that suddenly had bound them. He belonged to her now. She hadn't realized what it would mean. She had thought it only a whim—a desire to overcome a vague reluctance. She had been told that she was primitive. It might be, but this was something intricate, not to be measured by any past experience.

Strange, they'd had to get themselves into the middle of a fog to see clearly. She laughed.

It seemed hours that the launch crept on without a sight of anything. A wail, rising to a scream, then trailing away like the fading anguish of some one murdered, came through the wilderness of mist. Then she heard water pounding against rocks.

Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

The lines coursed through her warmly, like an old wine. They passed so close to the unseen rocks that her sensitive

ears caught the separate tones of the scattering waves. The eerie wailing was nearby.

It was, she realized, Alcatraz Island, the prison rock, with its banshee fog-horn. They crawled away. The sound of the breakers died, and the sinister voice grew fainter. She thought of the military prisoners, pityingly. Why did they put them on this desolate rock, where the fogs loved to linger? She thought of herself as a prisoner of circumstance, released at last.

She was too eager to wait. She wanted to grasp at every hint of the future. So much lay before them, John and her. She saw herself presiding at his table, entertaining grave professors and their austere wives. She maintained the proper dignity, yet exuded verve enough to save the evening from dullness. He'd be proud of her. She wouldn't look tired and old—not ever if she had him and didn't have to drag herself to Cattoni's every night. At the faculty receptions she'd add to his prestige with her poise and charm . . . But perhaps he wouldn't want all this. There might be reasons. Well, marriage didn't matter. Whatever he thought best. It might be even more charming to live in the background, in some shack on the Berkeley hills, far from the campus. He'd hurry there in the evenings, and tell her his adventures, and she'd tell him what she'd been reading and thinking. Gradually her life would lose its emptiness, its futility . . .

For a fact, one could see more plainly in a fog than under the glare of electric lights. She and John had never understood each other at Cattoni's.

IV

She turned toward him expectantly. But he was wrapped in an impenetrable mood. She lowered her head, tingling with odd and ends of dreams. Suddenly she looked up, and gasped.

They had come out of the fog, into a starlit night. A sweep of the rugged Marin coast was visible, with a senescent moon dropping wearily into the Golden Gate. Blue-black hills—so brown by daylight—towered almost within reach, and at their base stretched thin ropes of gleams, the town of Sausalito.

The water was tranquil, now that they approached the shore. She glanced back, and saw the white cloud through which they had come. It hid every trace of what lay behind, the teeming eagerness of San Francisco.

Hardly a minute later they slid into a pier beside the ferry slip. A thinly-lighted ferry was moored there for the night, looming gigantic above the launch.

They climbed out, suddenly conscious that they were stiff and chilled through. The spray clung like tears to their eyelashes.

Their feet clattered along an empty street, and then they trudged up a gravel road, past hedges, enormous trees and vaster shadows. The air was laden with eucalyptus. The stars were vivid, and the senile moon sent a faint glow through the trees.

All at once she was aware of a droopy, limpish feeling, as if all sparkle, all energy had gone out of her life. She wanted to slump down on the roadside, to relax every thought and nerve until she was clod-like. Controlling herself with an effort, she walked on.

He held her arm, lightly—in his old formal way, it seemed to her . . . Well, it was no use. She knew: the truth clung to her like a clammy garment. It was not a thing of reason, and yet she felt that she could find a hundred objections. She was twelve or fifteen years older. And she would have that gaunt, weary look again and again. She couldn't escape it. Any more than he could elude his precise, self-conscious manner. She

saw him now as a timid young man, absorbed by his work, with a passion for knowledge but none for life, secretive, perhaps never to be swept away by anything.

No, it couldn't happen . . . not even as an interlude. She didn't want him—now. It would have been easier, she realized, to have gone on sketching dreams about him and to have known he was indifferent. But she hadn't wanted him at all. She'd longed for something—something vague, that always had lurked just out of her reach—something he had represented. And she—she must have been the symbol of some dim fancy of his. That was all.

He was talking. He spoke distinctly enough, coherently enough, but his words blurred as they reached her. She picked out some of them.

" . . . Ruth's place . . . just ahead. Porch light . . . left on for us. Probably sitting up for us, having a party . . . You . . . didn't say three words—all the way over . . . What were you . . . thinking about so hard?"

She felt, desperately, that she must reply—quickly. She mustn't seem upset. After all, there was nothing to worry her, was there? She had just proved to herself that it was all an illusion. She was too old and too practical to bother about mere moods.

She found herself explaining—a little too shrilly and volubly, she was afraid.

. . . Sure, she'd been thinking—thinking about lots of things. Wondering about fogs and how ships ever got through them safely . . . Thinking what a good sleep she'd have tomorrow—today, she meant . . . Wishing Cattoni would quit staying open Sunday nights—the greedy Wop! She'd been figuring she'd better get some new clothes if she were going to hold that precious job of hers . . . Planning what to get. In fact, putting

in a lot of thought on those clothes . . . Wondering who else would be week-ending at Ruth's—Ruth hadn't said, and she generally had a bunch . . . Anyway she hadn't heard *him* rending the air with his conversation. What was he thinking about all that time?

He responded, with his customary precision, and this time his words flowed into her ears unthwarted. Her cheeks burned with anger at his serenity. She'd been wrong to think she'd meant anything to him, even a symbol.

"Well," he was saying, "most of the time I was trying to plan a paper I'm to write for the Journal of Scientific Research. It's a pity one can't ignore one's work—out on a holiday—but it has a way of intruding everywhere. Yes, I spent most of the time thinking about that paper. And also I was worrying over the fact that I failed to grade the test papers turned in Friday in one of my physics classes, that I'd have to worry over them some time Sunday night. And I—I . . ."

He broke off, and cleared his throat, and turned away.

She knew that he too had lied, that her first impression had been right. And, as they started into the house, she touched his arm sympathetically.

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Herausgeber und Verleger: Whit Burnett, Eigentümer: Whit Burnett und Martha Foley, beide in Wien, XVIII., Poetzleinsdorferstrasse 16. — Verantwortlicher Schriftleiter:

Dr. Max Kulka, IX., Liechtensteinstrasse 2.

Druck: Gesellschaftsbuchdruckerei Brüder Hollinek in Wien, III., Steingasse 25.